

# Position Statement



## Methane Digesters –SB 538 & HB 5033

*The Sierra Club asks that you OPPOSE Senate Bill 538 and House Bill 5033 that provide state subsidies for anaerobic (methane) digesters for use on factory farms.*

### Issue Background

**SB 538** – would provide low interest loans (subsidies) for methane digesters and other agricultural energy production systems from Michigan's Small Business Pollution Prevention program.

**HB 5033** – would provide property tax exemptions for methane digesters and other agricultural energy production systems.

### Sierra Club Perspective

Conversion of decomposing animal manure into a burnable fuel has some merit, but public funds should **not** be used to subsidize the operation of industrial livestock operations which are causing severe air and water pollution in Michigan and are putting family farmers out of business.

Preventing the horrific air and water pollution from industrial livestock operations (known as *concentrated animal feeding operations* or *CAFOs*) throughout Michigan is crucial. These bills, however, are **not** the solution. They would give significant economic boosts to polluters for a technology that falls far short of addressing the real problems of factory farms. Subsidizing these facilities may actually **encourage** more industrial livestock operations to be built in Michigan.

- **The bills would subsidize polluters.** While the legislation excludes facilities with criminal violations or civil violations with fines of \$10,000 or more, grossly under funded DEQ enforcement efforts mean few polluting operations would be excluded. There is no reason to believe polluting CAFO operations would come into compliance as a result methane digesters.
- **Methane digesters do not eliminate most of the pollutants from animal waste generated by CAFOs.** Digestion will not reduce or eliminate antibiotics, hormones or heavy metals and provides minor reductions in pathogens. These contaminants will continue to degrade the quality of both surface and ground water when spread on farm fields.
- **Alternative methods for reducing methane would also help reduce other pollutants and environmental problems.** Liquid waste systems pose many health and environmental threats. Changes in feed can reduce the production of methane from industrial livestock operations.
- **Energy production from digesters is minimal compared to the investment.** Digesters have a short life span. There is a reason why the promoters of methane digesters are asking for taxpayer subsidies – *these systems cannot pay for themselves*. The energy production is minimal compared to the huge investment, questionable environmental benefits and short life span of these facilities.
- **Major sources of odor from CAFOs are not addressed.** Much of the odor from large concentrated animal feeding operations comes from the buildings and the lagoons, which will see no controls from methane digestion.
- **Ammonia and NOx production and discharge to the air could increase from digesters.** Even though methane is removed through the digester process, ammonia and NOx emissions are both expected to increase.
- **State subsidies for anaerobic digesters would create further pressures on the state budget that is already structurally out of balance.**